

TFQ Stakeholders get first look at clinical support tool in December

Several months of collaboration, planning and effort paid off in December when members of the Together for Quality (TFQ) Stakeholder Council got their first look at the proposed electronic clinical support tool that is at the center of the Alabama Medicaid Agency's effort to move toward a more patient-centered, coordinated health information system.

"We have been able to accomplish so much in such a short space of time due to the hard work of the various workgroups," said Kim Davis-Allen, TFQ project manager. "The clinical workgroup has spent a lot of time designing screens and prioritizing needed information. One of their suggestions has been the creation of the summary screen which will at first glance provide key patient information, alerts and updates. This design allows the physician to then select an area to see more in-depth information."

Now with a tangible product in hand, TFQ stakeholders and others involved in the Medicaid transformation initiative will work to launch a pilot project in early 2008 while taking steps to create a system to exchange information on clients shared by various state health and human service agencies, according to Davis-Allen.

The next step is to work with Patient 1st physicians in 11 pilot counties to test the effectiveness of the electronic clinical support tool, care management or a combination of the two, Davis-Allen said. The components will be piloted in a mix of urban and rural areas test and determine which component provides the best service for the patient.

"We want to see what works best to achieve the best outcome for the patient," she said.

Physicians in Bullock and Pike counties will concentrate on the coordinated care component of the project while physicians in Jefferson, Winston and Houston counties will work strictly with the clinical support tool. Providers in Tuscaloosa, Lamar, Pickens, Calhoun, Talladega and Montgomery will test both components. The target start date for Bullock and Pike counties is February 1, 2008 with the other counties coming on board later in 2008.

All providers participating in the pilot project will be able to access the electronic clinical support tool using a web browser. At the same time, Medicaid will work with physicians and others to create an interface with select electronic medical record systems so practitioners who have those systems can enhance their own records with the information and alerts available through the electronic support tool.

Special features built into the electronic clinical support tool will help physicians by alerting them to needed actions based on clinical rules. For example, if a practitioner is seeing a diabetic patient who has not received a hemoglobin A1-C test within the last 12 months, the tool will "alert" the provider that the test is needed. The tool also will combine recipients' insurance information with paid claims data, immunization records, drug prior authorizations, and referral information to give the practitioner a more complete patient picture.

In addition to the electronic clinical support tool, the grant makes it possible for the Agency to implement an intensive care management program targeting chronic health conditions. Stakeholders initially identified six areas of concern, but the initial focus will be on diabetes and asthma. The Agency is in the process of finalizing the care management protocols with the Alabama Department of Public Health which will actually employ the care managers and oversee that component of the program.

The next phase of the TFQ project will focus on creating a system to exchange information on clients shared by Medicaid and the Alabama Department of Senior Services (DSS), Davis-Allen said. DSS is the first of several state agencies that will be able to access shared information to better coordinate services between agencies working with the same client.

"Medicaid and DSS serve many of the same clients and this is an area in which we can pool our resources to share specific client information and avoid duplicating administrative services," she emphasized.